



FOR: **THE OSTHOFF RESORT**
101 Osthoff Avenue
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HISTORY OF THE OSTHOFF RESORT

FROM RAILROAD TRAVELERS TO ROAD RACERS, THE HISTORIC OSTHOFF RESORT ATTRACTS VACATIONERS AND JET SETTERS

ELKHART LAKE, WISCONSIN – The year is 1886. More than two decades have passed since the last shot was fired in the Civil War and Grover Cleveland is serving what will be the first of two presidential terms—and also become the first president to marry while in office. Coca-Cola is created and the St. Louis Browns defeat the Chicago White Stockings in the World Series.

America is enjoying the prosperity of the “Gilded Age” as fashionable travelers pack steamer trunks and seek respite from the summer dust and heat of the city. Many head for the exciting new Osthoff Hotel at Elkhart Lake in southeastern Wisconsin, opened in 1886 by German entrepreneur Otto Osthoff and his wife Paulina. Quickly, the Osthoff becomes a favorite of affluent travelers who appreciate luxurious accommodations and an ambiance featuring quality entertainment and fine dining.

City folk from Chicago, St. Louis and Milwaukee are taken with the idea of traveling north by rail for a summer holiday. More than 2,000 visitors weekly are pouring into the tiny village of Elkhart Lake in pursuit of a place beside the fresh, spring-fed lake (that, more than a century later, still is valued for its water quality). By the dawn of the 20th Century, six resorts have emerged in or around Elkhart Lake. The boom continues well into the 1900s, fueled by the inauguration in 1909 of Interurban service into the village.

In the next 90-plus years, the tiny resort community—and with it the Osthoff—is to experience a colorful and checkered history. The town becomes a gambling Mecca and a Prohibition-era hideaway for gangsters, where speakeasies coexist with dairy farms and revenue men track moonshiners. Eventually, though, the village falls into a decline and in the mid-1950s the Osthoff Hotel is sold and for more than 30 years is operated as a drama and arts camp.

Fast-forward to 1989, with the Osthoff ready for its next incarnation. A group of investors purchase the property to develop a condominium resort. They recognize that the setting is ideal, with acres of wooded grounds and 500 feet of sandy beach fronting what remains among the purest lakes in Wisconsin.

Capturing the grandeur of the original Osthoff Hotel, today's resort opened its doors in 1995. The resort now offers 245 spacious suites and guest rooms. One, two and three-bedroom suites range in size up to 2,300 square feet and feature a kitchen or kitchenette, dining and living room, TV, fireplace and private balcony. Guest rooms feature a king-size bed, private balcony, two-person whirlpool bath, wet bar and TV.

This past summer, the Osthoff added a massive new wing featuring a 10,000-square-foot conference center and a 100-seat restaurant, Lola's on the Lake, with casual fine dining, a companionable bar-lounge and splendid views of Elkhart Lake.

The expansion also included the opening of the new Aspira Spa, a facility that provides a holistic, organic approach to the spa experience—offering personalized services that reflect ancient healing techniques of indigenous people from around the world. The Osthoff Resort becomes the first hotel in the region to offer guests the “spa suite” concept. Spa suites feature comfortable living areas that include amenities such as fireplace, whirlpool tub, patio, love seats and showers.

The Osthoff Resort has earned the prestigious AAA Four Diamond rating for the past seven years, making it one of the premier resort destinations in the Midwest. In 2002, the Wisconsin Innkeepers Association presented The Osthoff Resort with its coveted “Innkeeper of the Year” award.

Special events, from a re-creation of a traditional German Christmas market on the Osthoff grounds to the nationally acclaimed “Jazz on the Vine” music and wine festival, draw visitors year-round. And while the old train depot still stands in the center of Elkhart Lake more than 100 years later, you'll find most visitors today arriving at The Osthoff Resort by car.

Early History of Elkhart Lake

The Potowotomi Indians first called Elkhart Lake “Me-shay-way-o-deh-ni-bis” (or Great Heart Lake) after its shape resembling an elk’s heart. Scooped out by the ancient glaciers, the lake is wrapped by the lush woods of Wisconsin’s beautiful Kettle Moraine. Early settlers from the Rhine region of Germany were attracted to the area for its farming potential. Soon after, visitors came by stagecoach, then train, drawn to the lake, the charming resorts around its shores and to the abundance of recreation.

In the early 1950s, the arrival of motor racing breathed new life into the region, attracting elitist road racers with their exotic BMWs and Porsches. In the beginning, gentlemen race-car drivers actually held their races on county roads. These were soon discontinued because of problems with crowd and traffic control, and Elkhart Lake became home of Road America road-racing circuit.

This permanent track was built into 570 acres of rolling hills southeast of the village and became the longest natural track in North America. Soon, the village regained its old luster as it morphed into a major stop on the international auto-racing circuit, spoken of by racing glitterati in the same breath as Monte Carlo.

In all, the permanent population of Elkhart Lake is just over 1,000 residents. Nearly everything is within walking distance, from landmark resorts to newer galleries and boutiques, giving it added charm. Regardless of season, weekends always bring vacationers strolling the streets. The appeal, it appears, is indeed timeless.

For more information contact The Osthoff Resort, 101 Osthoff Avenue, Elkhart Lake, WI 53020-0151, 800-876-3399—or check the Web site at www.osthoff.com.

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